GOOD RIDDANCE

Violence, floods define difficult year

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

From dreadful and deadly acts of nature to man-made tragedies that turned the nation's attention on the Capital City, 2016 was perhaps one of the most turbulent years in Baton Rouge history, and one that many residents were glad to see end.

Yet, despite its chaotic record, the year also showed humanity at its finest, with neighbors and strangers reaching out to help each other during difficult times.

Perhaps not coincidentally, these acts of compassion, which highlighted a community torn by tornadoes, flooding, racial unrest and violence, also came during the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Nature's Fury
For many, the year will be remembered for the great flood. Certainly, SEE YEAR PAGE 19

In a year permeated with nationwide racial unrest, and one that brought violence to the Capital City this summer, local law enforcement officers dressed in protective riot gear and a young African-American woman meet on a Baton Rouge city street. Photo provided by CNS

Preserving culture difficult for Hispanic families

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Rudis Benitez fondly remembers Christmas in his native El Salvador as an afternoon at the beach, enjoying sunsplashed skies while grilling and playing soccer with friends.

He would also spend time at his aunt’s restaurant in downtown San Salvador, mingling with the patrons who would often give him money to buy fireworks.

"Christmas Day we were sleeping; we were tired," Benitez said.

His wife, Yeni, a native of rural El Salvador, also remembers Christmas Day as time at the beach or with family.

In the Hispanic community, Christmas Eve night is the center of the celebration, complete with a large dinner, spending time with family and friends and dancing the night away to festive music. At the stroke of midnight the music briefly stops, a prayer is said to celebrate Christ’s birth, hugs are exchanged and the music and dancing continues often into the wee hours of the morning.

"We don’t really celebrate Christmas Day," said Yeni, who owns a house cleaning business. "We celebrate Christmas Eve, we stay until midnight, give hugs and we dance."

As is also common in the Hispanic community, fireworks play a major role in the holiday rituals. In fact, the fuse is lit on Dec. 12, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and fireworks are set off daily through the beginning of the new year.

"Here, I did not get to see fireworks unless we went to the levees (for the lighting of the bonfires)," said Rudis, who has resumed the tradition in his Gonzales neighborhood. "That was a big tradition (in El Salvador)."

Alexia Benitez, the oldest of the couple’s children at age 14 and a student at East Ascension High School, admits among her peers fireworks are reserved for New Year's Eve.

"They usually don’t do the big parties on Christmas Eve," she added. "They do them on Christmas Day. It’s like Christmas morning they are opening their SEE CULTURE PAGE 20"
Las Posadas

For most, Christmas Eve marks the beginning of the Christmas celebration. In the Hispanic community, however, the celebration begins more than a week earlier with the Las Posadas novena. Celebrated mainly in Mexico and the United States, Las Posadas begins Dec. 16 and ends Dec. 24.

This Catholic tradition dates back 400 years and helps the faithful prepare for Christmas by reliving the days Mary and St. Joseph experienced during the journey to Bethlehem.

The novena, which was first brought to Mexico by Spanish Augustinian friars in the 16th century, begins with a nighttime procession. Participants hold candles, sing Christmas carols and two people portray the roles of Mary and St. Joseph. Those participating typically gather in different homes, each designated as an “inn.” Translated, posada means inn.

Each night the head of the procession holds a candle, and before Mary and St. Joseph are recognized and allowed to enter, the resident, or “innkeeper,” sings a song. The remainder of the participants then enter and gather at the Christmas tree or Nativity to pray the rosary, read Scripture, sing sacred songs and eat a festive meal consisting of Hispanic dishes. Perhaps best of all for the children, there is traditionally a star-shaped piñata at each house, with each of the seven points representing one of the seven deadly sins.

The piñata allows the adults to explain the religious significance of this custom, including that blindfolding the children represents blind faith. The beating of the piñata symbolizes Christ’s overcoming sin.

DID YOU KNOW

Manifestation of the Divine

By Dina Dow

“We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage … They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage.” (Mt 2:1-11, Gospel excerpt, Epiphany Sunday)

“I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon him … Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.” (Jn 1:32, Gospel excerpt, 2nd Sunday on Ordinary Time)

These two Scripture passages share a commonality. Both describe an appearance of the divine in space and time, also known as an Epiphany, “A Concise Dictionary of Theology.” The term “epiphany” is another term used to explain a visible manifestation of God.

Our Catholic faith celebrates the Epiphany of the Lord two Sundays after Christmas, thus concluding the season. (Aside ... for those along the Gulf South, it is also known as King’s Day, which begins the Mardi Gras season.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains in paragraph 528, “The Epiphany is the ‘manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Savior of the world. The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the Wise Men (Magi) from the East together with his baptism in the Jordan. The Magi began their spiritual journey motivated by the revelation of God manifested in nature. After guiding the Magi to the Christ Child, the purpose of the star had ended. Henceforth the light of Christ himself guides the people to God” (CCC 439, 528). God’s plan of salvation is open to all who “follow the star.” The result of an encounter with Jesus is the transformation from being a mere follower to becoming a real believer.

Similarly, we hear John the Baptist’s testimony of the Epiphany at the baptism of Jesus. God’s manifestation comes from his voice, with the son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The once waters reserved for repentance and preparation are now transformed sacramentally for forgiveness and the regeneration of grace. Those now plunged into the waters of baptism of God incarnate are no longer sojourners but heirs.

These are extraordinary encounters with God. Even more so, they describe a personal encounter with Jesus. The heartbeat of our faith is to personally encounter Jesus, to deepen our faith each day and to share our encounter and faith with others. Instead of giving gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, we give Jesus our very being. Our gold is the treasury of truth, our frankincense is our prayer and our myrrh is our self-sacrifice we make for others each and every day.

But the greatest gift we can share is the love of Christ with all we meet. Despite the lack of charity we see in the media, love does exist. We are to be confident in this and express it each day. Encountering Jesus means crossing all barriers and lines drawn by negativity, hatred and false reporting. We are disciples, not ostriches. To bury our head in the sand means to extinguish the stars which lead the Magi to Jesus. God tells Isaiah (49:6), “I will make you a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

We are the light to the nations. We are his messengers of salvation. We are his heirs. We are his epiphany. Go and be a manifestation of Jesus for others to see the glory of God. For they will know we are Christians by our love. Amen. Happy New Year!

“We let, therefore, offer gold unto the new-born Lord, that we may confess his universal rule; let us offer unto him frankincense, that we may believe that he who has appeared in time, was God before time was; let us offer him myrrh, that just as we believe him not subject to suffering and death, so let us offer unto him rejoicing and glory. Amen. Happy New Year!”

Dow is the director of Evangelization & Catechesis for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

PICTURES FROM THE PAST

The St. Francis of Pointe Coupee Chapel has a long history that includes three different churches and several moves. As a parish, St. Francis dates to 1728, with the first church built 10 years later. In 1760, a second church was dedicated, approximately four miles down river from the previous building. The church stood for 130 years but as the community relocated to other areas, St. Francis ceased to be an independent parish and became a mission chapel. The current church was dedicated May 29, 1895 on property donated by Jules Labatut and his wife. In the 1930s the church was moved to its present location following the construction of a new levee. The confessional, which is believed to be from 1729, is one of the oldest pieces of church furniture in Louisiana.

Photo courtesy of the Department of Archives, Diocese of Baton Rouge.
Unplanned pregnancy brings joy to mother’s life

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

“I knew her,” said Brittany, a Baton Rouge area woman who wishes to remain anonymous, when she heard the galloping-horse sound of her unborn daughter Charlotte’s heartbeat during an ultrasound at a crisis pregnancy center. This crystallized in Brittany’s own heart and mind what she should do concerning her pregnancy. She resolved to give birth to Charlotte, with whom she shares a mutually life-giving relationship.

On Jan. 27, many Americans plan to mark the 47th anniversary of the United States Supreme Court’s upholding of Roe v. Wade by participating in March for Life in Washington, D.C. and calling for the end of legalized abortion. Many youth from the Diocese of Baton Rouge will make a pilgrimage to the Capitol to join in the march.

In Baton Rouge, people will converge downtown and march to the State Capitol as part of Louisiana March Life South on Jan. 21.

In addition to protesting the abortion law, march participants express support for women such as Brittany, who experienced in a deep, real way what it means to face the dilemma of a crisis pregnancy and make their stand by saying “Yes” to life.

Brittany said she was 21 years old and everything appeared to be going well in her relationship with her boyfriend at the time. She had been dating him for several years, and his family liked her. Then, we found out we were pregnant, his family decided that I must have been a big cheater, because there’s no way their son could be the father,” said Brittany.

“It was an awful situation. They (the father’s family) wanted me to have an abortion. I was devastated. I was in love at the time,” she added.

Brittany went to Care Pregnancy Clinic in Baton Rouge.

“I cried the entire time,” said Brittany, who was 12-weeks pregnant at the time of her visit. “When the clinic gave her an ultrasound and she could hear Charlotte’s heartbeat, I decided that this is my daughter,” said Brittany. “That gave me the backbone I needed. I said, ‘I have to stand up for her.’

“I knew what her name was going to be and knew exactly what she was going to look like – strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes.” She said Charlotte, now 6, is indeed a miniature version of herself.

“We even have the same scar. I have a scar on my ear, she has a scar on her ear,” said Brittany.

She faced opposition from her boyfriend’s family for her decision to keep her baby. “They tried to tear me down. And I wouldn’t hear of it,” said Brittany. She did, however, have the support of her family. She lived with her parents and received help with Charlotte. Her mom went with her to doctor appointments and birthing classes. She said her parents are doting grandparents.

Once a paternity test verified that her boyfriend was the father, he filed for, and was granted, joint custody of Charlotte.

Brittany calls Charlotte, whose favorite color is purple and loves dancing and cheerleading, the “joy of my life.”

“She is the sweetest child. She is so caring, so giving. She only wants what’s best for everyone. She doesn’t even think of herself,” said Brittany.

Charlotte also helped bring focus to Brittany’s life. During her pregnancy with Charlotte, Brittany, who is Catholic, started reading the Bible, which helped her develop her faith life.

She stayed in school, and now she is a dental assistant. She is happily married and she and her husband have a son named Beau, 3, who was born in March, the same month as Charlotte.

“Charlotte is a great older sister,” said Brittany, who at the time of the interview was six-weeks pregnant and at the clinic for an ultrasound on her third child. When Charlotte held her baby brother for the first time at three years old and he fussed, she calmed him by singing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” She was also happy that according to custody arrangements, Charlotte would spend Christmas with her and her family.

With many women facing crisis pregnancies, they hear the baby being referred to in impersonal terms such as “fetus,” or non-human terms such as “tissue” and face outside pressures to abort the baby. Some may be vulnerable to going through it, especially if they are dealing with rejection. Brittany said the choice of what to do should be the mother’s, and they should not be coerced into abortion by others.

“Since they are the ones going through the abortion, they should know the consequences that go along with it,” said Brittany.

She urged mothers with unplanned pregnancies to consider adoption and “give the baby a chance at life.”

“And if they want to keep the baby and be a mom, go for it,” said Brittany.

Formation conference scheduled

The Gulf Coast Faith Formation Conference Jan. 12-14 at the Pontchartrain Center in Kenner will have a distinctly local and regional flavor for the more than 1,000 parish and school catechists, religion teachers, religious and clergy who attend, said Dr. Alice Hughes, executive director of the Office of Religious Education (ORE) for the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

The Diocese of Baton Rouge, along with the dioceses from New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Houma-Thibodaux, Lake Charles and Alexandria in Louisiana; Jackson and Biloxi in Mississippi; and Birmingham, Alabama assumed the planning duties for the conference, which will explore the theme “Prayer: The Faith Prayed and Lived.”

In addition to dozens of workshops in evangelization, technology, Catholic identity, Pope Francis and discipleship, adolescent/youth catechesis, forms of prayer, spirituality, family catechesis and special needs, there will be an entire track devoted to liturgy.

The conference will start with a “leadership day” beginning Jan. 12 at 1 p.m. Dominican Father David Caron, vicar of evangelization for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, will speak about spiritual leadership and evangelization. At 2:45 p.m., Dr. Daniella Zupan-Jerome, professor of pastoral theology at Notre Dame Seminary, will speak on “Connected Toward Communion;” at 4 p.m., Paul Sanfrancisco, director of technology for the Owen J. Roberts School District in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, will discuss “Cultivating a Faith-Based Digital Community.”

Archbishop Gregory Aymond will celebrate the conference-opening Mass on Jan. 13 at 8:30 a.m., followed by Sister Lynn’s keynote at 12:45 p.m. Sister Lynn is a practicing attorney who lives at the Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama. She works with children who have been abused or neglected, with juveniles and with the disabled.

For information, go to go4th.faith or call Aline Harbison at 504-866-6255.

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WASHINGTON (CNS) — It began with the fatal shootings of unarmed black men and women by police. It was exacerbated in the summer when, on July 7, a gunman in Dallas opened fire on police during a march, killing five officers in a presumed act of retaliation.

Catholic Church leaders such as Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Atlanta in August called on others “to resolve to address the issues that lie beneath these acts of violence.” But no one imagined then that frustrations about race and racism in the U.S., which began with the police shootings, were about to get worse in the later part of 2016.

At a news conference during the U.S. bishops’ general assembly in Baltimore in November, Archbishop Gregory said the reaction to the presidential election had added to an existing tension this year over matters of race in the country.

Those who work with multicultural communities, such as Jordan Denari Duffner, a research fellow at Georgetown University’s Bridge Initiative, which studies Islamophobia, said comments made during the campaign led to “a general kind of anti-otherness that has emerged.” When it comes to Islamophobia, she said, anyone who “looks Muslim,” be it because of the color of the skin or what they may wear, can evoke a reaction from others that can lead to attacks, she said.

This kind of “anti-otherness” in the air, some say, has resulted in a rise of hate and racism. The Southern Poverty Law Center said that 10 days after the election, almost 900 reports of harassment and intimidation from across the nation were recorded. Many took place in public places or places of worship, at work, at schools and even in grocery stores.

In a recent column for Catholic News Service, Archbishop Gregory said “the belief that one group is superior to another due to race is a grave moral disease whose recurrence, aggressiveness and persistence should frighten every one of us.” Racism has “clearly not been cured in our nation,” he said.

He warned that “whenever one can play on the fears of some people and depend upon the ignorance of others, racism flourishes. As a political strategy, such taunting may win votes, but it destroys national unity and our future.”

Economic inequality, which plagues different communities, he said, has been used to pit one group of people against another and “when one group is made to feel that its economic situation results from the coddling of another, the reaction is often a racist response,” Archbishop Gregory said.

That’s when a country starts seeing attitudes such as “immigrants are taking our jobs” and “public aid only rewards laziness,” and “poor and struggling white people have been forgotten,” he said.

Sister Patricia Chappell, executive director of Pax Christi USA, said this election “showed the racial but also economic polarization that our country is in the midst of” and which had become apparent earlier in the year.

Even in times of strife, those like Sister Chappell and Duffner say, some positive things have come about.

Duffner said solidarity between groups that have been targets of hate, such as between Jews and Muslims, or the black community and those who have been victims of Islamophobia, is visible. She noted that members of the Catholic Church need to do more to reach out to and humanize groups that were demonized during the election.

She cited figures from a 2016 Brookings Institute and Public Religion Research Institute poll that showed the difference between white Catholics and Catholics of other ethnic and racial backgrounds. It showed that, even as the church becomes more diverse, certain biases persist and are based on a person’s racial background.

The summer 2016 Brookings/PRRI poll showed that more than half of white Catholics said discrimination against whites is “as critical as discrimination against non-whites.” More than half supported a “Muslim ban” and said immigrants were a burden on the country because they “take jobs, housing and health care.” The figures were in contrast to Latino Catholics, the second largest ethnic group in the church. They said, by 62 percent, that “discrimination against whites is not as big a problem as discrimination against blacks and other minorities in the U.S.”

Latino Catholics overwhelmingly rejected a “Muslim ban” on immigrants, with only 25 percent in favor.

Refugees, migration a front-burner topic

WASHINGTON (CNS) — American artist Jacob Lawrence detailed the plight of black Americans in the South who were discriminated against, exploited for their labor, threatened with death and sometimes killed, and who lived in substandard conditions until they made their way north in hopes for a better life in his landmark work “The Migration Series.”

The final panel of Lawrence’s 60-panel series, which had its first showing in 1941, reads simply: “And the migrants kept coming.”

Today, 75 years later, those migrants are still coming. They’ve left their homelands, torn apart by war, religious persecution, drugs, gang violence, natural disasters, and political and economic upheaval factors that often feed into each other. Estimates in 2016 placed the number of immigrants worldwide at 65 million, 21 million of them refugees with many millions more labeled “internally displaced” only because they still live within the borders of their birth country.

Refugees and what to do about the situation raised continued attention during the marathon presidential race.

The United States, cognizant of the swelling
Beyond expectations: Pope sees God of surprises at work in 2016

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Pope Francis described 2016 as a “packed year,” one full of initiatives that helped Catholics “see and touch with their hands the fruits of the mercy of God.”

“The Lord always surprises us and goes beyond our expectations,” the pope said Nov. 28, looking back at what happened over the past 12 months, especially in events related to the Year of Mercy.

While the jubilee celebrations dominated the papal calendar, they did not halt other activities and responsibilities, nor other surprises.

After decades of work and hope and prayer, Pope Francis finally was the first pope to meet with the Russian Orthodox patriarch. He and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow met briefly in Cuba in February and signed a joint declaration.

In April, after visiting with refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos, Pope Francis, without prior announcement, brought 12 of them back to Rome with him.

In May, Pope Francis held a dialogue with the superiors general of women’s religious orders from around the world. One of the women asked him to establish “an official commission to study the question” of the identity and role of the women described as deacons in the New Testament and early Christian writings.

The pope agreed and later appointed six men and six women to the commission, which held its first meeting in late November.

Here’s a look back at some other items from the pope’s 2016 diary:

In January, Pope Francis became the third modern pope to visit Rome’s main synagogue. He paid special tribute to a handful of Holocaust survivors present for his visit.

In April, the Vatican released Pope Francis’ postsynodal apostolic exhortation on the family, “Amoris Laetitia,” insisting that God’s plan for the family is that it be built on the lifelong union of one man and one woman open to having children. The pope called for an overhaul of marriage preparation programs and for the prayerful accompaniment of Catholic couples whose marriages have failed.

In June, in a small, family-like gathering, Pope Francis helped retired Pope Benedict XVI celebrate the 65th anniversary of his priestly ordination.

In July, Pope Francis joined hundreds of thousands of Catholic young people in Krakow, Poland, for World Youth Day and, like many of them, he paid a silent, prayerful visit to Auschwitz, the nearby Nazi death camp.

In August, the pope made a brief visit to Assisi for the 800th anniversary of the “Pardon of Assisi,” a celebration of God’s forgiveness.

In September, Pope Francis canonized St. Teresa of Kolkata in the presence of hundreds of Missionaries of Charity, thousands of poor people assisted by the order and tens of thousands of Catholics from around the world.

In October, Pope Francis flew to Sweden to join Lutheran leaders beginning a yearlong commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

RESEARCHERS ▼
From page 4

number of refugees, accepted roughly 100,000 from around the world for fiscal 2016, which ran Oct. 1, 2015, through Sept. 30, and announced its intent to accept 110,000 in fiscal 2017.

However, with Donald Trump’s electoral victory, no one can say for certain what U.S. refugee policy will look like.

Conventional wisdom, though, suggests the 110,000 mark will not be met. A continuing resolution to fund the federal government through April 28 capped the funding for refugee resettlement. At the same time, a bill that would have increased funding to accommodate the 110,000 figure was not voted on before Congress adjourned.

“The incoming administration would have the purview to adjust that planned number,” said Bill Canny, executive director of the U.S. bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services.

Last year, MRS and its diocesan affiliates resettled 23,643 refugees in fiscal 2016, plus another 73,623 who entered the United States through a special immigrant visa program that recognizes their service to the United States in their home country but despite the difference in status, they have the same needs as refugees, bringing the total to 97,266.

MRS is the largest of nine U.S. resettlement agencies helping refugees. MRS’ network of affiliated diocesan programs grew this year by six to 95. It takes about one year for dioceses to set up the capacity, and the buy-in, to do this work.

Some Trump backers have called for a registry of Muslims in the U.S., perhaps in the form of a database for visitors and new arrivals from Muslim countries. Others have called for withholding federal funds for self-styled “sanctuary cities,” where elected officials have pledged to not cooperate with federal officials to arrest immigrants in their areas who are in the country without legal permission.

Jill Bussey, an attorney who is director of advocacy for the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, said that by her count there are about 400 sanctuary jurisdic-

tions, cities, counties and the like. Some colleges also have declared themselves sanctuary campuses.

While families fleeing war are most commonly thought of as refugees, “I don’t think we draw a distinction on fear here,” Bussey told Catholic News Service. “The reality is an individual who faces fear of death in Central America, extrajudicial killings, gender-based violence that fear is just as real as the fear of people who are fleeing war-torn areas.”

“I am an eternal optimist,” said CLINIC’s Bussey, who predicts “a lot of high-impact litigation” in the coming year. “It’s advocacy when we’re trying to save someone form deportation, and crying because you see a 5-month-old baby in a detention center.”

please Join Us

As the Lent approaches, we are preparing Our Annual Lenten Guide. This guide will include:

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Send us your events and recipes to:
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Issue Date: February 17
DEADLINE DATE: FEBRUARY 8
Can a woman say the homily?/Catholic-Jewish wedding ‘Orans’ posture

Q At Mass, after the Gospel has been read by a priest, can the female parish life director give the homily? With six priests sitting down? At one of our local parishes, this happens regularly. (Upstate New York)

A The current guidelines of the Catholic Church on this matter are quite clear. The Code of Canon Law says: “Among the forms of preaching, the homily, which is part of the liturgy itself and is reserved to a priest or deacon, is pre-eminent” (No. 767).

Similarly, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, which serves as the church’s liturgical “rulebook,” says, “The homily should ordinarily be given by a Catholic priest preside at the wedding, and he says this would be awkward for his family as well. Are there ways to have a ‘neutral’ presider celebrate the service and still have the marriage recognized by the Catholic Church?”

Is this possible, and what would I need to do to make it happen? (Cleveland)

A Yes, in a situation like this a diocese is able to give permission ahead of time for a marriage ceremony to take place in a nonsectarian setting, witnessed by a civil official, and have that marriage be recognized by the Catholic Church. You and your fiancé should speak with a local priest to see that the proper paperwork is completed. But how about, instead, doing a joint religious ceremony that would highlight the role of God in a marriage and seek the Lord’s blessings?

Only one, either the rabbi or the priest, would be designated as the responsible civil official to receive a couple’s vows, but both the rabbi and the priest could offer prayers from their own traditions and appropriate blessings.

Q A discussion that is common between the more “orthodox” members of the parish and the more “progressive” ones is whether the faithful should use the “orans” posture during the Lord’s Prayer. As you say, though, it has become common in some congregations for the faithful to adopt the “orans” posture – with hands extended to the side and facing up or out. The priest, by contrast, is directed specifically in the rubrics to adopt the “orans” posture during the Our Father.

Some liturgists have pointed to this as a bit of an anomaly: Generally, the celebrant extends his hands during the parts of the Mass when he is praying aloud and alone, on behalf of the congregation; during the Our Father, he is praying not on behalf of the congregation but along with them – as in the Gloria and the creed, when his hands are joined.

I can’t imagine that it matters a lot to God.
Prayer ‘cornerstone’ of healing process at OLOL

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Moments before the trauma team entrusted to save Baton Rouge Police Officer Nick Tullier’s life went to work, they gathered in a circle, held hands and prayed.

It was a moving moment, perhaps even rare at some hospitals, but for the staff at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center prayer is an essential component, especially among team members whose very profession demands they straddle the abyss between life and death.

The trauma team, they deal with a lot of stuff,” said Lucia Hamilton, director of pastoral care services at OLOL. “They do a good job of supporting each other. Having prayer, having that sense of faith, helps people recognize that it’s not just me.

“When cases are challenging and difficult, there can be a source of open resilience. (Prayer) is what makes this hospital different.”

The past few months have placed a premium on the emotional and physical resources of the trauma team. Not only was the team instrumental in saving Tullier’s life in July, they rode another emotional roller coaster in November when 17-year-old David Wesley was transported to OLOL after being shot and hit by a vehicle while helping a victim in need.

Sandwiched between those two shootings was the historic flooding, which impacted approximately one third of the hospital’s nursing staff, according to Colletta Barrett, director of missions at OLOL. Although the events of the past year, dating to the spring tornadoes, have been difficult, perhaps none have been as challenging as caring for Tullier, who was one of six law enforcement officers shot by a lone gunman on a quiet July 17 morning.

Three of the officers died. The shootings came two weeks after police shot Alton Sterling sparking several weeks of civil unrest in Baton Rouge.

“Sometimes when you have a (socially disrupted) situation, prayer has a way of centering things,” Hamilton said. “We believe healing is body, mind and spirit. As a Catholic health care institution, we believe it’s more than just the physical, that the spirit and emotional are an important component of all that.”

Tullier would spend several months at OLOL before being transferred to rehab at a medical facility in Houston. While in Baton Rouge, prayer became as critical in his care as any medical treatment, a fact exhibited by the staff, especially the nurses, who, when taking their break, went to pray with other officers who were holding vigil near their comrade’s room.

It was also not unusual to see deputies praying in Tullier’s room, and when nurses would walk in, they would join the officers.

“There was a real sense of community, lifting the family up in prayer,” Hamilton said. We still have this need for ritual, and so when there is a traumatic event in a department, we will frequently get called to provide comfort and prayer to the staff. I think in this culture they naturally turn to prayer. It’s in the air here.”

Barrett said that culture of prayer is cultivated from the first day of orientation, when new employees are told that their spirituality and belief systems are central “to who we are, how we deliver care and that they must take care of themselves in order to be there for others. They must figure out what feeds their spirituality because it is a requirement.

“What we tell people is you’re not going to get fired if you don’t pray; we are very clear about that. But we invite people in to pray and to take care of their spirituality. What we do is request people to respect our traditions. What it says in the mission statement is in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.”

Barrett said that in her 11 years at OLOL, no one has come up to her after orientation and rejected those requirements.

“What I can tell you is prayer is a cornerstone, very much in the fabric and DNA of the organization,” she said, adding that each meeting is opened with a prayer, even conference calls.

Also, at the beginning of each shift, staff members gather for what is called a “huddle,” which opens with a prayer, and moves into expressions of ministry and closes with a portion of the mission statement.

Additionally, twice daily, at 7:30 a.m. and 9 p.m., a prayer is piped through the hospital’s intercom system.

“A culture is built not by happenstance or circumstance; a culture is built by repeatable, reliable processes that then drive how people respond,” Barrett said.

Hamilton said prayer is the most common resource people turn to in times of difficulty. Research has shown that prayer does have an impact on the body physically.

Tullier’s family also believes in the healing power of prayer, as was witnessed throughout Tullier’s stay at OLOL. The family has also used social media to encourage prayer, and each post is ended with a plea for continued prayers.

“(The Tullier family is) very open and requesting of prayer,” Hamilton said. “They would say please keep praying for us. Their requests opened the door for people to gather around in prayer. I believe (prayer) has helped. But that is the mystery,”

Deputy Nick Tullier was transferred from OLOL to TIRR Memorial Hermann Rehabilitation Hospital in Houston on Nov. 16. “It has been our honor to serve Deputy Tullier, and we pray for his continued healing as he begins the next phase of his recovery,” OLOL president and CEO K. Scott Wester said at the time.

The Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center trauma team gathered in prayer as Baton Rouge police officer Nick Tullier, one of six law enforcement officials shot July 17, was being transported. “Prayer is what makes this hospital different,” said Lucia Hamilton, director of pastoral care service at OLOL. Photos courtesy of Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center.
It takes 3 types of intimacy for a marriage to thrive. Happily, these are also the basis for our 3 Christian marriage vows. In down to earth and sometimes humorous ways, Dr. Healy, a counseling psychologist with over a third of a century of full-time experience working with families, will help couples discover again what it takes to live out these vows fully and joyfully.

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RHS gym comes down

Demolition crews are shown taking down the gym at the former Redemptorist High School. Crews first removed the metal siding that was above the cinder block, above. The metal was stacked outside to be sold for scrap, all under the watchful eye of the wolf mascot, which was still hanging in the gym. Photos by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Before taking down the building, crews removed the bleachers along with the railing, below. The bleachers will also be sold for scrap. The final step was taking down the cinder block walls with a crane. The old administration buildings are scheduled to be demolished later this year, and Cristo Rey Baton Rouge Franciscan High School is planning to build a new school at the site.

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2016: A YEAR OF VIOLENCE, FLOODS AND MERCY

A statue of the Blessed Mother was all that was left of the home of St. Benedict the Moor parishioners Donovan and Andrea Johnson Forté after destructive tornadoes struck South Louisiana on Feb. 23, killing two and injuring dozens of others in Convent. In many instances where homes were destroyed, statues of Our Lady remained, as if exhorting people to have faith and courage.

Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Students at St. Thomas More School in Baton Rouge release blue balloons after finding out their school was named a 2016 National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education. Two other Catholic schools in the diocese, St. George School and St. Joseph’s Academy, also received the honor last year.

Photo provided by Tootie Lee | St. Thomas More School

Father Paul Counce closes the Holy Door at St. Joseph Cathedral following Mass on Nov. 13. The Holy Door had been opened Dec. 8, 2015 marking the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Looking on are Deacon Joseph Scimeca, left, and Deacon Chauvin Wilkinson Jr.

Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Two Zachary police officers attend a prayer service while members of the St. John the Baptist Church choir in Zachary sing. The prayer service was one of many held in July following the shooting of six law enforcement officers, killing three.

Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

Floodwaters surround Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant on Aug. 18. Although the church was spared from the initial flooding, backwater flooding did cause water to get into the church as well as the rectory.

Photo by Richard Meek | The Catholic Commentator

The dining hall, pictured here, as well as most of the other buildings, at St. Joseph Abbey and College was flooded when the campus received more than two feet of water from torrential rains. The March flooding in South Louisiana heavily impacted families and business owners throughout Tangipahoa Parish and forced many individuals to be rescued by boats.

Photo provided by Matthew Dunn, seminarian

A girls’ CYO team is honored in this file photo provided by the now-shuttered CYO office.

Photo provided by CYO

A statue of the Blessed Mother was all that was left of the home of St. Benedict the Moor parishioners Donovan and Andrea Johnson Forté after destructive tornadoes struck South Louisiana on Feb. 23, killing two and injuring dozens of others in Convent. In many instances where homes were destroyed, statues of Our Lady remained, as if exhorting people to have faith and courage.

Photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator
Those pesky mosquitoes can also be killers, students learn

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Animals such as wolves, sharks, alligators, bears, giant spiders and snakes may have the reputation of being the deadliest animals on Earth and many times are the ones chasing people in their nightmares. But the deadliest animal in the world, according to the World Health Organization, is tiny, the tinier the more deadly, and hangs out with people in the backyard as they barbecue, swim or have evening soirees. The only attention they may get from people is an irritated swat.

“I learned that more than 725,000 deaths by mosquitoes are reported each year,” said John Foster Benoit, a fifth-grade student at St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge. “Every 45 seconds a child is killed by malaria.”

Benoit shared the facts on the cold-blooded killers given during an educational day on mosquitoes presented by the Louisiana Mosquito Control Association at St. Aloysius School on Dec. 6.

The Louisiana Mosquito Control Association is a statewide organization that represents local mosquito control districts in civil parishes throughout the state, according to Bryan Massery, chairman of the association’s education committee and public information officer/biologist for the St. Tammany Mosquito Abatement District. The 52-year old program has funded parish-wide mosquito control programs in 24 civic parishes and has more than 350 members.

In conjunction with the association’s annual convention, the members present an educational day in a school within the district hosting the event. This year’s event was held in Baton Rouge and St. Aloysius, which expressed strong interest in the program.

During the event, students learned to “understand the adversary” by informing themselves about mosquito biology, surveillance, disease testing, control methods and how to protect themselves from the pest.

“We need everyone to understand that they can contribute to mosquito control. Potentially dangerous mosquitoes are not just in remote swamps or marshes; they are often right outside your door. Go on a search and destroy mission to eliminate water-holding containers on your property. Use repellents. Protect yourself,” advised an informational sheet near a display of Asian Tiger mosquitoes.

Students spent the day listening to presentations, going outside and observing various species in mosquito traps, viewing and learning about technology and equipment used for mosquito abatement and looking for mosquito larvae themselves in various containers of water. The lessons correlated with the students’ biology lessons, said Massery.

With more than 60 different species of mosquitoes in Louisiana, there’s much to be learned about them, Massery stated.

“The information about the mosquitoes is that they are not just a bug that flies around them and annoys them and makes them itch — there’s a lot more to it than that,” said Massery.

He credited the students for coming into the presentation with a working knowledge of mosquitoes.

“The students were attentive and engaged,” said Massery. “I asked them what they already knew about mosquitoes and it was nice that they gave some thoughtful answers. They know mosquitoes can bite and carry diseases. These are often answers you don’t get until after they get through with the program.”

And while activities ended with “Misty the Mosquito” doing a dance for the students, the children received information about the serious problems these pests can bring.

“The headline” diseases carried by mosquitoes are the Zika and West Nile viruses. Forty-five West Nile and 39 Zika viruses were reported in the state as of Nov. 10, according to the Louisiana Department of Health.

“Some are right outside their doors. Those pesky mosquitoes could breed in so many types of water,” said fifth-grader Adler Rice. “Some prefer saltwater and some prefer pond water — things like that.”

“I learned that they have antennas and they are blood suckers. But some don’t bite,” said Nicholas Ferrell, also in fifth grade. He was pointing to the fact that only female mosquitoes bite. Both male and female mosquitoes feed mainly on fruit and plant nectar, but the female also needs the protein in blood to help her eggs develop. Once she’s had her fill of blood, she’ll rest for a couple of days before laying her eggs.

“It was shocking to have the teachers (mosquito program presenters) tell us all this,” said Amelia Allemond, another fifth-grader. “I learned that mosquitoes can carry diseases and you have to dump water out if it is stagnant. There’s probably mosquito larvae there,” she said, indicating her commitment to practice mosquito control.
CHS student receives perfect ACT score

By Rachele Smith
The Catholic Commentator

Stephen Gaudin is in an elite group of students. The Catholic High School junior has earned the highest possible composite score on the ACT.

Gaudin’s score of 36 on the college entrance exam is something of a rarity. According to Ed Colby, a spokesperson for the American College Test program, less than one-tenth of one percent of students who take the test walk away with a perfect result.

“I was pretty surprised when I found out I got a 36 on the ACT,” said Gaudin, who added he has taken the test every year since the seventh grade when he was first invited to do so through Duke University’s Talent Identification Program (TIP).

“I felt I did better this time, but I didn’t think I scored perfect,” he said.

Getting that high score, however, was Gaudin’s goal, and he was “ecstatic when I first found out.”

Gaudin, who attended St. Thomas More School in Baton Rouge, credits his mom, Anne Marie Gaudin, for encouraging him to take the test as often as possible.

“I guess it has paid off because I knew what to expect and was prepared to do well on the test,” he said.

The ACT, which measures a student’s readiness for college work, is composed of four tests in the core subjects of English, math, reading and science. Each test is graded on a scale of 1-36, resulting in a composite score from those individual test averages.

Gaudin commented he didn’t have a test strategy or secret to his high score. While some students are encouraged to take preparation courses, spend hours with test practice or even fix a special high power breakfast the morning of the test, he did none of that.

Rather, he just continued with his regular school work (he’s in the honors program, so some of his courses are accelerated) and remained committed to his many school activities and clubs, including playing in the school’s drum line, working as editor of the Junior Classical League and serving as a student ambassador and vice president of the math society, Mu Alpha Theta.

He said the only strategy he used was a reading technique his English teacher, Sanders Davis, suggested.

The technique is designed to help with time management while reading the typically long or technically strong passages for the ACT’s reading comprehension portion.

Gaudin said instead of reading each passage first then answering the questions that followed it on the timed test, he learned to glance at the questions first before reading the first paragraph fully. He would then focus on topic sentences for the rest of the paragraphs, helping him know where to return for the answers to difficult questions.

With a perfect score, Gaudin is now receiving unsolicited mail from colleges around the country. Since he is still a junior in high school, he has time to determine where he would like to go, but he already has some select schools in mind based on his intended major: aerospace engineering.

“I’ve always been interested in flying and planes. I think it started when I was younger, and my family and I would go to Pensacola, Florida to see the Blue Angels (the Navy’s flight demonstration squadron),” he said.

Gaudin has expressed interest in attending the United States Naval Academy, the Air Force Academy, Georgia Tech, Texas A&M or Stanford University.

“Having great respect for the military (his cousin, whom he calls an inspiration, is a U.S. Marine), Gaudin said he would be honored to serve his country in the armed forces. However, if he is not piloting an aircraft in the future, he explained he would be interested in helping with the first manned mission to Mars, specifically working with the design and construction of booster rockets.

“I don’t want to do the normal stuff people want to do. I want to explore everything out there,” he said, adding, “I’m excited to see what life has to offer.”

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**Diocese of Baton Rouge Catholic Schools Office**

**Principal Opening**

**St. Elizabeth Catholic School**

Paincourtville, LA

St. Elizabeth Catholic School was founded in 1876 and currently serves 233 students in Grades PK3 – 8. With 15 professional staff members, the school operates as a Catholic Christian family devoted to spiritual growth and academic excellence in a caring and safe environment. The school recently completed the self-study process for district reaccreditation.

St. Elizabeth Catholic School is part of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, which has thirty schools in eight civil parishes. There is a strong Catholic identity focus in all schools. The district is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (AdvancED). All schools work together to Evangelize Hearts, Educate Minds, Encourage Talent and Embrace the Future.

Applicants who meet the following criteria will be considered for an Interim Principal Position for 2016-17 or a Principal Position for 2017-18:

1. Practicing Catholic
2. Minimum of 5 years of experience in education, preferably in Catholic schools
3. Demonstrated Leadership Ability
4. Qualifications to meet the Non Public certification requirements for Louisiana

Mail resume, copies of all college transcript(s) showing degrees and three letters of recommendation to St. Elizabeth Catholic School Principal Search Catholic Schools Office P.O. Box 2028 Baton Rouge, LA 70821-2028

**Deadline:** Applications will be considered as received for Interim Principal (2016-17) Applications for Principal (2017-18) must be received by March 15, 2017

**Applications for Principal (2017-18)**

January 6, 2017

The schools of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, admit students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at its schools. They do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school administered programs.
A striking performance from Jessica Chastain as the ruthless Washington lobbyist of the title propels director John Madden’s forceful study of political corruption. The win-at-all-costs wheeler-dealer shocks her colleagues when, driven by personal conviction, she abruptly changes sides in the fight over a pending gun control bill, abandoning her cushy position with a topflight firm (led by Sam Waterston) and signing on with a fledgling outfit (headed by Mark Strong) for what she realizes will be an uphill battle against the National Rifle Association and its allies. Potential casualties in the high-stakes conflict include one of the staff members (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) who switched companies with her, and who harbors a long-hidden secret. Despite its obvious — and, for Hollywood, predictable — partisan bias, and its preference for dramatic effect over ethical seriousness, as penned by Jonathan Perera, the film is fundamentally moral. Yet its exploration of the protagonist’s unhealthy personal life, in which she uses a male prostitute (Jake Lacy) as a partner for emotionally empty, commitment-free sex, will be off-putting even for some mature viewers. Semi-graphic nonmarital sexual activity, a prostitution theme, several uses of profanity and rough language. A-III; R

Assassin’s Creed

Fox

Though the mayhem that pervades this adaptation of a popular series of video games is mostly bloodless, other more unusual problems render it unacceptable for all. After being unexpectedly saved from execution by a secretive organization (Marion Cotillard plays one of its officials), a criminal (Michael Fassbender) gets filled in, along with the audience, on a bit of alternate history: the age-old feud between the Knights Templar and the Assassins. While the power-hungry Templars aim to eradicate free will, and are on the trail of an artifact that will enable them to do so, the Assassins, supposedly the good guys in this plot, are nihilists who deny the existence of truth and reject all moral norms. For reasons best known to them, Cotillard and her colleagues have decided that the optimal way to stop the Templars is to use a time-travel machine to send Fassbinder or at least his consciousness back to 15th-century Spain where he will control the body of an ancestor of every battle. There he also witnesses the work of the Templar-backed Inquisition. Tainted by a dumbed-down vision of the past, and of the church, director Justin Kurzel's preposterous brew curdles swiftly. False values, anti-Catholicism, sometimes harsh but rarely gory combat violence, at least one instance each of rough and crude language. O; PG-13

Fences

Paramount

Much suffering mingles with brutal honesty and joy in unexpected moments in the first screen adaptation of August Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning 1983 play. Denzel Washington stars as an embittered Pittsburgh garbage collector; he also directs from the screenplay finished by Wilson before his 2005 death. The long speeches will require a committed attention span, but the focus on ideas and their consequencen makes this family drama which also features Viola Davis acceptable for mature adolescents. References to adultery, frequent use of the n-word and a single instance each of profanity and rough language. A-III; PG-13

Jackie

Fox Searchlight

A mesmerizing performance by Natalie Portman as Jackie Kennedy, reflecting on loss while building the Camelot myth in the weeks following the 1963 assassination of President John Kennedy’s (Caspar Phillipson), is mixed in with overwrought monologues and not-quite-accurate history. Director Pablo Larraín and screenwriter Noah Oppenheim focus on how Jackie of his who was “in the thick of every battle. They then try to keep that fact a secret. But at least some viewers will appreciate the complicated emotions to which this situation gives rise and the skill with which both leads convey them. Two premarital encounters, one of them semi-graphic, a couple of glimpses of rear nudity in a sexual context, a pair of mild oaths, a single cuss word. A-III; PG-13

Silence

Paramount

Dramatically powerful but theologically complex adaptation of Catholic author Shusaku Endo’s 1966 fact-based historical novel about two 17th-century Jesuit missionaries (Andrew Garfield and Adam Driver) in Japan. Shocked by rumors that their mentor in the priesthood (Liam Neeson) has renounced the faith under persecution, they voluntarily leave the safety of Europe in order to find their role model and minister to the underground Japanese church. What follows is a long, sometimes harrowing battle between doubt and human frailty on the one hand and fidelity on the other. Director and co-writer Martin Scorsese’s often visually striking drama is deeply thought provoking and emotionally gripping. But the narrative he inherits from Endo is not for the poorly catechized since it stretches and twists fundamental issues of faith and morality in a manner reminiscent of British novelist Graham Greene. Religious themes requiring mature discernment, much violence, including scenes of gruesome torture and a brutal, gory execution, rear and partial nudity. L; R

For more Movie Reviews, visit thecatholiccommentator.org and look under ENTERTAINMENT.
Create seasons of love in 2017

A new year begins for our lives. “525,600 minutes” seems like a lot! What will you do with this gift of time? The 1990s hit “Seasons of Love” originally was part of the Broadway musical “Rent,” but the version of the song I like is from the cast of the Fox TV show “Glee.” The song asks us to consider how we will respond to the beautiful gift of all the days, hours and minutes that 2017 offers.

Each year brings us four seasons as one of the ways to mark the passage of time. Yet, when it comes to the flow of our lives, we have the opportunity to experience many more seasons of love. Are you willing to turn the next 525,600 minutes into ways to “measure your life in love?”

The song asks us to consider everyday moments like “sunsets,” “midnights,” “cups of coffee” or thousands of other daily possibilities as times for love. As you live through these moments, you can turn 2017 into a year when the presence of love comes to the flow of our lives, we will respond to the beautiful gift of all the days, hours and minutes that 2017 offers.

There is a multitude of ways, but why not start with appreciation? Everyone needs to be appreciated, but the routines of family life can lead to taking people for granted. Make it your active practice during 2017 to notice even the little aspects of good in each family member, and then mention to each of them how you value these attributes of who they are. Dedicate yourself to being a mirror of the goodness that you value these attributes of who they are. Dedicate yourself to being a mirror of the goodness that you value these attributes of who they are. Dedicate yourself to being a mirror of the goodness that you value these attributes of who they are.

How do you measure a year in the life of friends?
How about love?
How about love?
How about love?

In truths that she learned, or in times that he cried
In bridges he burned, or the way that she died

You got to, you got to Remembeer the love
You know that love is a gift from above
Share love, give love, spread love
Measure, measure your life in love

On The Record
Charlie Martin

This could occur just about anywhere you interact with others. Be on the lookout! Be spontaneous!

Life can be challenging. Sometimes, we cannot help others with their difficulties, but we can bring a certain lightness of heart to many situations. We never want to devalue another’s suffering, but at times we can help him or her avoid getting lost within this hurt. Share your humor, a positive perspective or words of hope and encouragement. All dark is transformed by light. Create more seasons of love by being the “light switch” in others’ lives.

The song suggests that “though the story never ends, let’s celebrate, remember a year in the life of friends.” Create many seasons of love in 2017 for your friends.

Arrange mini-celebrations when good things happen to others, for example, when a friend passes away. Blessings that come into your friends’ lives.

Be the one who finds ways to celebrate the small blessings that come into your friends’ lives.

Yes, you’ve got 525,600 minutes called 2017. “You know that love is a gift from up above” – a clear reference to the source of all love. God invites you to be a co-creator with him for the blessings that can flow from your love in this new year. How many seasons of love will unfold because of your active intent to manifest God’s presence to others?

Martin is an Indiana pastoral counselor who reviews current music for Catholic News Service. Your comments are always welcome. Please write to cmartin@hughes.net, or at: 7125 West CR, 200 South, Rockport, IN 47635, or like this column on Facebook at “Charlie Martin’s Today’s Music Columns” and post a comment or suggestion.
The Magi still ride

Factual and accurate or not, St. Matthew’s story of the Magi has hit a spiritual and poetic nerve in some of the most brilliant writers of the English language. They see the Wise Men as making good on the Isaian promise that is fulfilled by the feast of the Epiphany.

Another Perspective

Father John Carville

The inventive genius of Christmas has turned the stable into a zoo.

So what is St. Matthew trying to tell us with these Magi? Philologists translate Magi as deceivers, magicians, astrologers or philosophers. Deceivers? They did sneak out rather than betray the Christ Child’s location to the evil Herod. Magicians? No pretension of any. Astrologers? They did locate a new wandering star. Philosophers? They weren’t dumb. And don’t many magicians stage shows the Magi with crowns on their heads? Well, one of their gifts was gold, common tribute to a king of King David’s lineage. Gold from eastern (pagan) kings to the King of the Jews as prophesy and later the Roman governor, Pilate, would call him. The child is the king of all of us, a king willing to die for all of us as the myth symbolizes. Suffering is the sign of the full humanity of Jesus. He is one of us and calls us to be one with all others. Frankincense is a sign of worship, our prayers rising like incense to God the Father of all. This child came to tell and to show poor lonely people that we are loved by God, with a love so powerful that it can overcome death and give eternal life.

We begin to see the Magi as a legend that could be true or, if not, an inspired theological creation of St. Matthew to teach his Jewish readers to see the infant in the manger as the savior of all the human race, not just of the Jews. And isn’t that truth even more urgent today as each nation vies for the natural resources of the other, and each wants the other to deny its growth and prosperity to prevent global warming, rising seas, violent storms, etc.? Will wealth or mercy be our God?

One thing that everyone, skeptical scriptural scholars and nostalgic crib builders alike, seems to agree upon is that there were three Wise Men. Read St. Matthew’s Gospel carefully again. He doesn’t tell us how many there were. He writes, “When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is the new-born king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.’” But then, it does sort of make sense that, if three gifts were offered to the child, there would be three gift bearers.

Factual and accurate or not, St. Matthew’s story of the Magi has hit a spiritual and poetic nerve in some of the most brilliant writers of the English language. They see the Wise Men as making good on the Isaian promise that is fulfilled by the feast of the Epiphany.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shone” (Is 9:1). G. K. Chesterton hit a spiritual and poetic nerve in some of the most brilliant writers of the English language. They see the Wise Men as making good on the Isaian promise that is fulfilled by the feast of the Epiphany.

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shone” (Is 9:1). G. K. Chesterton hit a spiritual and poetic nerve in some of the most brilliant writers of the English language. They see the Wise Men as making good on the Isaian promise that is fulfilled by the feast of the Epiphany.

“When he realized what had happened, Mr. Carville wrote in “Carol of the Brown King,” “Of the three Wise Men/ Who followed the star/ One was a brown king/ From afar.../ Unto his humble/ Manger they came/And bowed their heads/ In Jesus’ name./ Three Wise Men/ One dark like me—/ Part of his/ Nativity. To be reborn in Christ means to live a life of inclusiveness. The brown king, more than anyone else, knew this.

Most of us, in high school or college, were assigned to read O. Henry’s short story “Gift of the Magi.” Remember, it was the story of a married couple, Jim and Della. Although poor, each had one prized possession. For Jim, it was a gold watch handed down by his grandfather. Della was proud of her beautiful long hair. They had no money for gifts, so as Christmas approached they worried about what they could give the other. Finally, Jim sold his watch and with the money bought two “pure tortoise shell” combs for Della. She cut her hair, sold it and bought Jim a “platinum fob chain.”

When he realized what had happened, Jim just smiled. O. Henry ends the story by saying, “Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are the wisest.” They had each received the perfect gift, useless in one way, but priceless on the level of spirit. Each knew that they loved and were loved. Is this not the meaning of the Christ Child, and perhaps also of the gifts of the Magi?

May 2017 be a year of true wisdom that recognizes God’s gift of love that makes us all one in Christ.

FATHER CARVILLE is a retired priest in the Diocese of Baton Rouge and writes on current topics for The Catholic Commentator. He can be reached at johnmcarville@gmail.com.
**VIEWPOINT**

**Priests Formation Days spiritually enriching for clergy members**

**From The Bishop**

Bishop Robert W. Muench

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**Incarnation – God is with us**

**Father Ron Rolheiser**

his removal of them. Christ redeems limit, evil, sin and pain. But they are not abolished. Given that truth, we can celebrate at Christ’s birth without in any way denying or trivializing the real evil in our world and the real pain in our lives. Christmas is a challenge to celebrate while still in pain.

The incarnate God is called Emmanuel, a name which means God-is-with-us. That fact does not mean immediate festive joy. Our world remains wounded, and wars, strikes, selfishness and bitterness linger. Our hearts too remain wounded. Pain lingers. For a Christian, just as for everyone else, there will be incompleteness, illness, death, senseless hurt, broken dreams, cold, hungry, lonely days of bitterness and a lifetime of inconsummation. Reality can be harsh and the incarnation does not promise heaven on earth. It promises heaven in heaven. Here, on earth, it promises us something else.

- God’s presence in our lives.

This presence redeems because knowing that God is with us is what ultimately empowers us to give up bitterness, to forgive and to move beyond cynicism and bitterness. When God is with us then pain and happiness are not mutually exclusive and the agonies and riddles of life do not exclude deep meaning and deep joy.

In the words of Avery Dulles: “The incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape from the ambiguities of life and scale the heights of heaven. Rather, it enables us to burrow deep into the heart of planet earth and find it shimmering with divinity.” George Orwell prophesied that our world would eventually be taken over by tyranny, torture, double-think and a broken human spirit. To some extent this is true. We’re a long ways from being whole and happy, still deeply in exile.

However, we need to celebrate Christmas heartily. Maybe we won’t feel the same excitement we once felt as children when we were excited about tinsel, lights, Christmas carols and special gifts and special food. Some of that excitement isn’t available to us anymore. But something more important is still available, namely, the sense that God is with us in our lives, in our joys as well as in our shortcomings.

The Word was made flesh. That’s an incredible thing, something that should be celebrated with tinsel, lights and songs of joy. If we understand Christmas, the carols will still flow naturally from our lips.

- **OBELATE FATHER** Ron Rolheiser, theologian, teacher and award-winning author is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. He can be contacted through his website ronrolheiser.com or on Facebook at facebook.com/ronrolheiser.

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**Mission Statement**

The mission of The Catholic Commentator is to provide news, information and commentary to the people of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Catholics and their neighbors alike. In doing so, The Catholic Commentator strives to further the wider mission of the Church: to evangelize, to communicate, to educate and to give the Catholic viewpoint on important issues of the present day.
Coming Events

January 6, 2017

Pro-life Mass – A monthly pro-life Mass will be celebrated Tuesday, Jan. 10, 5:30 p.m., at St. Agnes Church, 749 East Blvd., Baton Rouge. For more information, call 225-385-4127.

Marriage Enrichment Program – Dr. James Healy, Director of the Center for Family Ministries of the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois, will speak at a marriage enrichment retreat, “How to Be Married and Stay Engaged,” Saturday, Jan. 14, 9 a.m. to noon, at the Catholic Life Center Ballroom, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge.

Dioecesan Youth Conference – The Dioecesan Youth Conference will be held on Saturday, Feb. 18 at the Catholic Life Center, 1800 S. Acadian Thwy., Baton Rouge. The theme will be “United: One Billion Temples of Christ and Counting.” Mary Bisleri, founder of All4Him Ministries, will be the guest speaker. Youth must register through a church parish or Catholic school with an adult contact by Wednesday, Jan. 18 for early bird registration and Wednesday, Feb. 1 for regular registration. For more information about registration and the conference, visit diobryouth.org and click on Events or call 225-336-8751.

Jam and Jazz Brunch – Catholic Community Radio will hold its “Jam and Jazz Brunch” on Saturday, Feb. 4 at the Renaissance Hotel, 7000 Bluebonnet Blvd., Baton Rouge. For more information, email davedaws@gmail.com or call 225-448-3754.
the historic rainfall in August, which resulted in catastrophic flooding and affected tens of thousands of homes and businesses, has changed much of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. Dumping more than three times as much rain on Louisiana as Hurricane Katrina, the rain storm shattered the area’s historic flood records set in 1983 and forced many families out of their homes and into shelters, hotels or the homes of family and friends. The event left 13 people dead.

The deluge also brought with it a heavy price tag and a heavy burden for the many property owners without flood insurance. It has been estimated to cost the U.S. economy more than $10 billion.

But the devastation also showed humanity at its best. Witnessing life-threatening circumstances affecting thousands, hundreds of boat owners and neighbors from communities nearby rushed to help others evacuate the rising water. Referred to as the “Cajun Navy,” these citizens have since been heralded as true heroes.

Other champions were groups from around the nation and even across town who rallied to help those affected by the flooding, offering everything from food and water to manpower for the arduous task of cleanup.

As families and businesses continue to rebuild, many churches and schools in the diocese that took on water, including Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs, St. Alphonsus Church and School in Greenwell Springs, Holy Rosary Church in St. Amant, St. Anne Church in Sorrento, and St. Jean Viannay and Redemptorist St. Gerard schools in Baton Rouge were back in business, having either completed or working on repairs to their buildings.

As destructive as the August floodwaters were to South Louisiana, they were not the first force of nature to strike the state in 2016. Six months earlier, in February, a record-breaking number of tornadoes (11 confirmed) plowed through Assumption, Ascension, St. James and Livingston civil parishes, leaving two dead and injuring dozens.

The funnel systems leveled homes, tossed cars and uprooted trees.

“All,” said Catherine Boudreaux who was interviewed shortly after a tornado caused extensive damage to her home.

“He let us know to get out of the way,” she explained.

But even as Boudreaux and her neighbors were immersed in the heavy task of rebuilding, less than three weeks later, another weather system struck the state.

This time, heavy rains in Tangipahoa Parish caused widespread flooding, forcing many residents to evacuate their water-drenched homes. Holy Ghost Church in Hammond also saw high water, but while it approached the rectory, it did not cause any damage.

Summer Violence

Although Mother Nature hurled destructive weather at southern Louisiana in 2016, the violence Baton Rouge suffered this summer was man-made. The events started with the shooting death of Alton Sterling by a police officer. Demonstrators (which included many people living outside of the Baton Rouge area and even the state) quickly gathered to protest the shooting, but the community was shocked when two weeks later, a lone gunman from Missouri shot six Baton Rouge law enforcement officials in the line of duty. Three of those officers, Brad Garafola, Matthew Gerald and Montrell Jackson, died. Two other officers were treated and released and a third, Deputy Nick Tullier, is still recovering and was recently admitted to a rehab center in Houston.

In response to the shooting, Bishop Robert W. Muench, joined by other clergy members throughout the diocese, called for prayer and peace, offering prayer services and other opportunities for the community to come together and unite as one. By late in the year, the Diocese of Baton Rouge formed a Commission of Racial Harmony, consisting of 13 members, as a commitment to a long-term effort in promoting understanding, compassion and respect for all people in the diocese.

Pro-Life Rulings

For Catholics following pro-life legislation, the year was active. At the close of the state’s legislative session, Governor John Bel Edwards signed four new pro-life bills into law, including the Unborn Child Protection from Dismemberment Act, which ends the practice of dismemberment abortion (commonly known as Dilation & Evacuation or D&E). The other bills prohibit health care facilities and clinics that perform abortions from receiving state funding, increase the waiting period between pre-abortion counseling and the actual procedure and place certification requirements on those performing abortions. However, in September, Louisiana’s law requiring all doctors who provide abortions have local hospital admitting privileges was challenged after the U.S. Supreme Court found a similar law in Texas unconstitutional.

Brick & Mortar

In February, Bishop Muench joined many dignitaries and students in breaking ground on the new Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital. Scheduled for completion in 2018, the new facility, which is located parallel to I-10 between Essen and Bluebonnet boulevards, will feature 350,000 square feet and house six floors that will include patient beds, a pediatric emergency room, surgical units and other care areas.

In addition to the new hospital, another building, this one important to the diocese’s past, will begin construction in the near future. After several meetings with neighboring residents, the diocese received approval to build a state of the art archival building to house and better protect documents, photos and other important items that reflect the history of Catholicism in the diocese.

Singing the Blues

Three Catholic schools in the diocese received good news shortly after the start of the current school year. St. Thomas More School, St. George School and St. Joseph’s Academy, all in Baton Rouge, were recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2016. Each school celebrated earning the prestigious award with special activities for students and teachers.

The honor followed an impressive report issued during the summer by the diocese’s Catholic Schools Office. Figures calculated from the 2015-16 school year showed Catholic school students in the diocese earned more than a combined $50 million in college scholarship money. It was a feat Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of Catholic schools, attributed to the commitment of educators as well as students.

The good news for Catholic schools, however, was overshadowed by concern regarding the state’s voucher program. Despite statistics released by both the Louisiana Department of Education and the Catholic Schools Office for the Diocese of Baton Rouge that show the state’s investment in scholarship students is paying off in the classroom, budget cuts could affect the program.

During the legislative session last year, the voucher system narrowly escaped the chopping block but was still forced to absorb a $2 million cut.

The state’s fiscal cutting measures also took a swipe at the required services program, which helps offset costs for Catholic schools, and school food salary supplements.

End of an Era

After decades of service to young people and their families, 2015 saw the closing of the Baton Rouge Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). For 71 years, the CYO sponsored sports teams for children and teens. Its history also included organizing student dances as well as classes, such as arts and crafts, for all ages.

With the CYO office no longer able to facilitate some sports programming for elementary Catholic school students, the Catholic Schools Athletic Association was created.

Administered through the
Yeni admits some difficulty adjusting to American cultures, including the popular sleepovers among teenagers, a practice she prohibits. Although she understands this is now their home, she is persistent about keeping alive her heritage, especially with children. "I have to let the children enjoy both parts, from our culture and the things they do here," she said. "I don’t want them to be odd and not know anything about the real life. We want them to know about our culture but they need to know everything about where they live."

The differences in Christmas traditions illustrate one of the many challenges the Benitez family, along with hundreds of Hispanic families scattered throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge, face in trying to maintain the relevancy of the culture from their homeland while adapting to a new way of life.

"The same with every tradition we have, we try to do some of what we grew up with and adjust to what they do here," Yeni said. "It’s kind of difficult because it would be easier just to do what everyone else does."

Rudis moved to Baton Rouge nearly 26 years ago to rejoin his parents, who had moved from El Salvador years earlier. He graduated from Robert E. Lee High School and is currently working as an electrical specialist in Texas, commuting to Gonzales on the weekends.

While the faithful were happy to welcome Father Edwin Martin to the priesthood and Deacon Ryan Hallford as a transitional deacon. Ordained on May 28 by Bishop Muench in St. Joseph Cathedral, Father Martin is now serving as parochial vicar at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge and Deacon Hallford was assigned to St. Margaret Queen of Scotland Church in Albany. Deacon Hallford is scheduled to be ordained to the priesthood in May.

In addition, Baton Rouge native Alex Harb was ordained as a Maronite Catholic priest. The ordination was conducted by Bishop A. Elias Zaidan, bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles, on April 23 at St. George Church in Baton Rouge.

Those differences are perhaps most evident during the holidays.

"A huge difference is we didn’t have a lot of presents," Yeni said of her childhood years. "It’s not about shopping, not about presents. It’s about getting together with the family and having a great time. Eat good food, dance and give everyone a big hug at midnight."

Another big difference, she added, is the weather.

"We can’t go outside (because of the cold weather)," Yeni said. "In El Salvador it is always hot. Here, you have to stay more inside."

Rudis said looking back at his younger years he never expected or even cared about receiving a Christmas gift but understands the tradition is different in the United States.

"It would break my heart not having a present for (his children) underneath the tree," he said. "But at the same time we try to instill the tradition from back home."

"We ask (the children) to write a letter to Santa Claus and tell him what you want," he added. "But we always tell them it is not Santa bringing it but the baby Jesus is bringing it. Therefore, in the morning they get up and see the presents and say, ‘Thanks Santa and baby Jesus.’"

"We just stay home and watch movies," Yeni said. "We were born in El Salvador. They don’t understand some-thing. That is the most difficult thing."

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Yeni and the two married in 2002, briefly living together in the United States before Yeni returned home to complete her immigration papers. She eventually moved to Baton Rouge permanently in 2007.

"We try to maintain our own Spanish and try to have them speak Spanish (at home)," Yeni said. "We were born in El Salvador. They need to learn about our culture. They don’t understand something."

Yeni returns home to complete her immigration papers. She eventually moved to Baton Rouge permanently in 2007.

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